

EMER O'BRIEN

Project Manager

What led you to pursue a career in construction?

I can't pretend I dreamed of working in construction as a young girl; in fact I had little insight into the industry at all in secondary school but I put Engineering down on my CAO form as a strong degree course which could equip me to pursue a range of rewarding career paths. As a Civil Engineering graduate, I looked at employment in Contracting and Consulting alike. Through a friend's recommendation, I applied for, and was given 'the start' with Pat Mulcair Civil Engineering (Now Roadbridge). After 2 weeks I was also offered a Consulting role but there was no decision to be made; I had thoroughly enjoyed the diversity and dynamic nature of site work and stayed put...for 28 years!

How do you think construction can attract more female candidates?

From my own experience the foundation subjects for construction and engineering (applied maths and physics) were less accessible to girls than boys in same-sex secondary schools. This situation has much improved although it seems the uptake by girls for these subjects at leaving cert is still much less than boys. I think the focus should lie with our educators to engender an interest in these subjects with females in both primary school but especially the first three years of secondary. It is a combination of educational steering and fundamental gender differences that determine the direction females take in secondary schools such that if we do address the former, then we should accept the resultant gender breakdown in construction (or any other sector) and further focus on acquiring the most suitable workforce regardless of gender.

What has surprised you most about working in construction?

Even back in the early 90's, when there was relatively little protocol or policies to prevent discrimination and promote gender equality in the workplace or formal graduate programme to define my early career path, I was overwhelmed by how helpful and supportive everyone was to me. Despite a huge emphasis on productivity in a challenging environment, the workforce (engineers and operatives alike) made a huge effort to show me the ropes and introduce me to every facet of construction work. The passion and motivation of the workforce initially surprised and impressed me but very quickly I would assume the same mind-set. I appreciate this job satisfaction was primarily due to a fantastic and quite unique company that valued its workforce and accordingly commanded uncommon loyalty and commitment

What makes Roadbridge a company for women to work in?

Roadbridge is an excellent, vibrant company for anyone to work in regardless of gender or persuasion, because of the inherent shared values and positivity of its workforce which pre-dates any legislative requirements that dictate conditions in the workplace. All Roadbridge employees are afforded the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities commensurate with effort and capability.

What's a perk about working in the construction industry that most people don't know about?

I think maybe many people assume that construction work is focussed on site-work and don't appreciate the extensive interfacing with other sectors as well as the diversity of other skills that are demanded of construction workers. The Infrastructural Contracts these days are so big compared with 15/20 years ago that a Contractor will necessarily have design/environmental/health and safety/ business competence as well as core construction capability. The acquisition of such a knowledge/skill base is certainly a perk of construction. Also and despite the obvious disadvantages, moving around from project-to-project affords a construction worker exciting experiences, challenges and close life-long bonds with a wealth of people and places offered by few other career paths.

What has been your favourite project to work on?

The N9N10 Knocktopher to Powerstown 40km Motorway Scheme was my favourite project. Although it was a sizeable scheme with plenty of Engineering challenges, it went very smoothly due to excellent inter-party relationships and a strong, motivated management team drawing from years of experience working together on similar projects. The Client I believe, recognised our commitment and capability and in turn supported our efforts to provide value, efficiencies and quality at every opportunity which ensured delivery within budget and ahead of schedule

